

# The Cask of Amontillado

Edgar Allan Poe

The thousand injuries of Fortunato<sup>1</sup> I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, **precluded** the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but

punish with **impunity**. A wrong is undressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally undressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.<sup>2</sup>

It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause

2. [A wrong is . . . done the wrong.] These sentences might be rephrased this way: "A wrong is not avenged if the avenger either is punished for taking revenge or does not make the wrongdoer aware that he is taking revenge."

1. Fortunato (fôr' tōō nă' tō)

#### Vocabulary

**preclude** (pri klōōd') v. to prevent; to make impossible

#### Vocabulary

**impunity** (im pū' nă tē) n. freedom from punishment, harm, or bad consequences

to doubt my good-will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation.<sup>3</sup>

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship<sup>4</sup> in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity—to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionnaires. In painting and gemmary Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially: I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley.<sup>5</sup> He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

3. Here, *immolation* means "death or destruction."

4. *Connoisseurship* (kon' ə sur' ship) is expert knowledge that qualifies one to pass judgment in a particular area.

5. *Motley* is the multicolored costume of a court jester or clown.

Matters of Life and Death What is the narrator's attitude toward the destruction of Fortunato?

#### Vocabulary

accost (ə kōst') v. to approach and speak to, especially in an aggressive manner

I said to him: "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking today! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado,<sup>6</sup> and I have my doubts."

"How?" said he. "Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi.<sup>7</sup> If anyone has a critical turn, it is he. He

will tell me——"

"Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi——"

"I have no engagement;—come."

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive

6. A *pipe* is a wine barrel that holds 126 gallons. *Amontillado* (ə mōn tē yā' dō) is a kind of pale, dry sherry from Spain.

7. *Luchesi* (lōō kā' sē)

Mood How would you characterize this opening exchange between the two main characters?

*Carnival in Rome, 1839. Aleksandr Petrovich Myasoedov. Oil on canvas. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.*

**View the Art** This painting depicts a street scene during Carnival. How would you describe the atmosphere in this painting? How does it compare with the opening scene from this story?

you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with niter."<sup>8</sup>

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a *roquelaure* closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.<sup>9</sup>

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them **explicit** orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

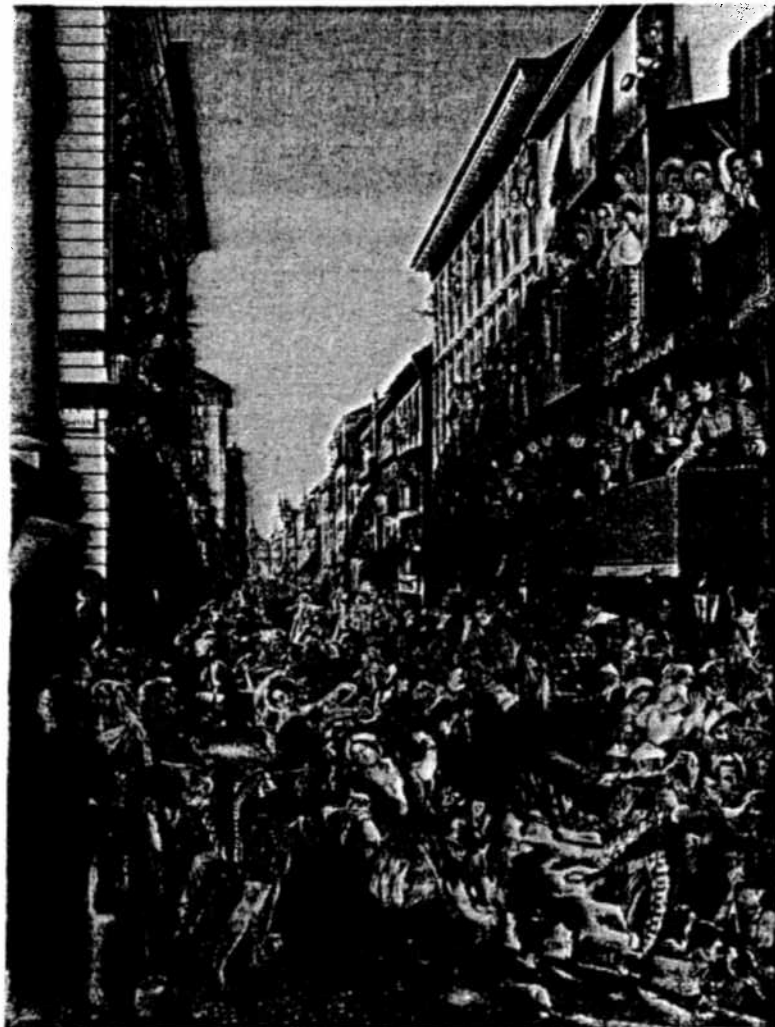
8. *Niter* is a salt-like substance found in cool, damp places.

9. A *roquelaure* (rōk ə lor') is a knee-length cloak that was popular in the 1700s. A *palazzo* (pə lāt'sō) is a mansion or palace.

Paraphrase *Restate this sentence in your own words.*

#### Vocabulary

**explicit** (eks plis' it) *adj.* definitely stated; clearly expressed



I took from their sconces two flambeaux,<sup>10</sup> and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

"The pipe?" said he.

"It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls."

10. *Sconces* are wall brackets that hold candles or torches, and *flambeaux* (flam' bō') are lighted torches.

He turned toward me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.<sup>11</sup>

"Niter?" he asked, at length.

"Niter," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?"

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!"

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

"It is nothing," he said, at last.

"Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi——"

"Enough," he said; "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily; but you should use all proper caution. A draft of this Medoc<sup>12</sup> will defend us from the damp."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mold.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"I drink," he said, "to the buried that repose<sup>13</sup> around us."

"And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant<sup>14</sup> whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"And the motto?"

"*Nemo me impune lacessit.*"<sup>15</sup>

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons<sup>16</sup> intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The niter!" I said; "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough——"

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draft of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon<sup>17</sup> of De Grève. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed



Visual Vocabulary Arms is short for "coat of arms," an arrangement of figures and symbols on or around a shield that, along with a motto, represents one's ancestry.

11. [filmy orbs . . . intoxication] This phrase describes Fortunato's eyes as clouded and watery from excessive drinking.
12. Medoc (mā dōk') is a French red wine. A draft is the amount taken in one swig or swallow.
13. To repose is to lie at rest, either sleeping or in death.

Mood What words in this passage suggest danger?

14. The Montresor family's coat of arms includes a golden foot on a sky-blue background and a snake rising up.
15. The motto is Latin for "Nobody provokes me with impunity."
16. Casks and puncheons are large containers for storing liquids.
17. The flagon is a narrow-necked bottle with a handle.

Matters of Life and Death How do these details add to the growing sense of entrapment in the story?



and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."

"How?"

"You are not of the masons."<sup>18</sup>

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said.

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaure*.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak, and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily.

We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt,<sup>19</sup> in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely

18. Here, *masons* is short for "Freemasons," an organization of stonecutters and bricklayers that was formed in the Middle Ages. By the time of this story, the masons had become a social group with secret rituals and signs.

19. A *crypt* is a burial chamber.

*Mood* What emotion does the description in this paragraph create?

the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry<sup>20</sup> into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see:

"Proceed," I said;  
"herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi——"

"He is an ignoramus," interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche,<sup>21</sup> and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered<sup>22</sup> him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help feeling the niter. Indeed it is *very damp*. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must positively

leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

"The Amontillado!" ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"True," I replied; "the Amontillado."

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I

soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently

"Indeed it is  
*very damp.*"

20. Here, *pry* means "to look closely; peer."

21. Here, the *extremity of the niche* (nich) is the farthest spot inside the recess.

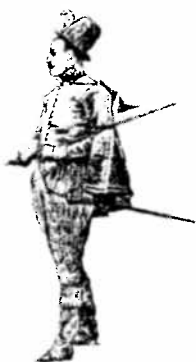
22. *Fettered* means "bound with chains or shackles; restrained."

Paraphrase *Restate these sentences in your own words.*

#### Vocabulary

*implore* (im plôr') v. to ask earnestly; to beg

Matters of Life and Death *What does Fortunato finally realize?*



Visual Vocabulary  
A *rapier* (rā' pē ər)  
is a long, light-  
weight sword with  
a sharp point but  
no cutting edge.

back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamored.

I re-echoed—I aided—

I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamor grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined<sup>23</sup> position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

23. Here, *destined* means "intended for a particular purpose or use."

Paraphrase *Restate these lines, and then explain why Montresor is doing what he is doing.*

"Ha! ha! ha!—he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!"

"The Amontillado!" I said.

"He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone."

"For the love of God, Montresor!"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud:

"Fortunato!"

No answer. I called again:

"Fortunato!"

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall

within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against

the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart<sup>24</sup> of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*<sup>25</sup> ☞

24. A *rampart* is a protective barrier or fortification.

25. *In pace requiescat* (in pă'chā rek'wē es kāt') is Latin for "May he rest in peace."



# After You Read

## Respond and Think Critically

### Respond and Interpret

1. What are one or two questions you would ask Montresor?
2. (a) How does Montresor get Fortunato to come with him to his vaults? (b) What is Montresor's motive for leading Fortunato there?
3. (a) Describe the conversation between Montresor and Fortunato as they walk in the catacombs. (b) What is ironic about Montresor's concern for Fortunato's health?
4. (a) What happens to Fortunato at the end of the story. (b) In what ways is this a "perfect" crime?

### Analyze and Evaluate

5. What details does Poe include to show Montresor as a cold-blooded killer? Do you think his portrayal is effective? Why or why not?

6. Why might Poe have chosen to write this story from the first-person point of view, describing only Montresor's thoughts and not Fortunato's?

### Connect

7. **Big Idea** **Matters of Life and Death** Do you believe that Montresor resolves his conflict with Fortunato? What else could Montresor have done to solve his problem?
8. **Connect to the Author** Poe is known as a master of the horror stories. Based on this story, would you agree? Consider the following before making your decision. What is the moment of greatest horror in this story? How well does Poe build up to this moment?

## Visual Literacy

### Illustration

Famed British illustrator Arthur Rackham created this image in 1935 to illustrate "The Cask of Amontillado." Study the illustration, looking carefully at the subject matter and details.

*Fortunato and Montresor, 1935.*  
Arthur Rackham.



**Group Activity** Discuss the following questions with classmates. Use evidence from "The Cask of Amontillado" to support your answers.

1. How accurately does Rackham re-create the setting of "The Cask of Amontillado"? Consider the size of the niche, the number of levels of brick, the chains, and the niter.
2. How accurately does Rackham re-create the characters? Consider their clothing, the expressions on their faces, and their postures.
3. How well does Rackham capture the mood of this moment in the story? Explain.



## Literary Element Mood

**Mood** is the feeling that an author creates in a literary work. The mood can suggest an emotion, such as fear or joy; it can also suggest the quality of a setting, such as gloom or airiness. For example, if Poe had described the catacombs as "peaceful" or "still," he would have created a quiet, restful mood.

1. Describe the overall mood that Poe creates in this story. In what way does the mood contribute to the story's suspense?
2. How does Poe create the mood? Point to specific examples throughout the story to support your answer.
3. What impact does the Carnival setting have on the mood of this story?

## Review: Suspense

As you learned on page 21, **suspense** is a feeling of curiosity, uncertainty, or dread about what will happen next in a story. Writers increase the level of suspense by creating a threat to the central character and raising questions in the reader's mind.

Details That Create Suspense	Why They Create Suspense
No one is home at Montresor's house.	No one can witness the crime.

## Reading Strategy Paraphrase

Review the chart you made while reading the story, and then answer the following questions.

1. Look at footnotes 10 and 11 on pages 60 and 61. Explain why footnotes and paraphrasing help you understand Poe's writing.
2. Choose a sentence from the story that requires paraphrasing primarily because of its difficult vocabulary. Then paraphrase the sentence.

## Vocabulary Practice

**Practice with Context Clues** Identify the context clues that help you determine the meaning of each boldfaced word.

1. Taking those classes will **preclude** the possibility of your working on the newspaper committee, which meets at the same time.
2. Would Joe be punished, or would he commit the crime with **impunity**?
3. Some people greet you in a timid way, while others **accost** you.
4. I have **explicit** instructions on how to get to the meet instead of a vague description.
5. "Please, please don't go to that party," Mrs. Weeks **implored**.

## Academic Vocabulary

Poe's essays and reviews are still read today for their literary **insights**.

—Meet Edgar Allan Poe, page 56

*Insights* is an academic word. A sports reporter who thoroughly analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of a baseball team might be said to have **insights** into the game of baseball. Using context clues, try to figure out the meaning of the word in the sentence about Poe above. Check your guess in a dictionary.

For more on academic vocabulary, see pages 54–55 and R79–R81.

## Literature Online

**Selection Resources** For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL49787u1.

